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John W. Jeffries. *A Third Term for FDR: The Election on 1940*.

*A Third Term for FDR* is a judicious study of the 1940 election in which an unusually popular president pursued a controversial third term as global conflict loomed. John W. Jeffries, the author of two previous books on wartime politics and society, emphasises how domestic considerations shaped the 1940 election. He argues that this contest is best understood not in terms of the fast-moving international events of 1939-1940 but as a “maintaining” election that showed both the depth and durability of the Democratic majority formed during the Great Depression and the remarkable strength of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s personal following (p. 5).

The first of the book’s five chapters provides necessary background on Roosevelt, the New Deal and Democratic Party politics in the 1930s but it is in the second chapter, on the Republican Party’s nomination of Wendell Willkie, that Jeffries really hits his stride. He makes effective use of recent work on the GOP by Robert Mason and others, stressing the long-range significance of organizational improvements made in the late 1930s by the Party’s first full-time national chairman, John Hamilton, and explaining how the New Deal, and the worsening international situation, intensified divisions between the Republican Party’s liberal and conservative, interventionist and noninterventionist, wings. Ultimately the pressure exerted on the GOP by the gathering international crisis constrained its choice of candidate, destroying the hopes of noninterventionist contenders such as Robert A. Taft and Arthur H. Vandenberg. At the same time, more liberal hopefuls, including the youthful “racket buster” Thomas Dewey, who would be narrowly defeated by Harry S. Truman in 1948, faded as the nomination season progressed, clearing Willkie’s path to victory.

Willkie, a charismatic lawyer and utilities executive whose success in the nomination fight cemented the ascendancy of the GOP’s liberal internationalist wing for a generation, ran a chaotic campaign and failed to win sufficient support from lower income and big city voters. Despite press support, notably from the Luce publications and the *New York Times*, he never entirely shook off the perception that he was the candidate of Wall Street and the business establishment. Jeffries concurs with Alice Roosevelt Longworth’s judgement that “the Willkie campaign comes right from the grass roots of every country club in America” (p. 74).

Unsurprisingly, Jeffries does not solve the riddle of precisely when and why Franklin Roosevelt decided to run for third term. “No one but Roosevelt has ever known the answers to that question,” he writes (p. 118). But *A Third Term for FDR* gives a balanced and perceptive account of FDR’s game-playing with Jim Farley and other Democratic presidential aspirants, highlighting his overarching goal of safeguarding liberalism’s future through and beyond the war years. Its assessment of Roosevelt’s campaign is equally persuasive. The final chapter, and the epilogue, offer comprehensive analysis of the election result and place FDR’s third term victory in the wider context of the politics of the 1940s.